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It's never too soon.

**A Blueprint for Preventing
Child Abuse by Strengthening
Massachusetts Families**

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Special Legislative Commission on Violence Against Children
and
The Executive Office of Human Services**

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Child Abuse by Strengthening
Massachusetts Families**

Special Legislative Commission on Violence Against Children
Senator Frederick Berry Representative Susan Tucker
Senate Chair House Chair

The Executive Office of Human Services
Philip W. Johnston, Secretary

The sooner you start to work on a problem the less likely it is to become one. Child abuse, in particular, is no exception.

Working on a problem as complicated as child abuse is never simple because there are so many factors that contribute to and influence family life. The economic environment, increased demands on family members, outdated social structures never designed to meet new and unanticipated needs, all add up to pressures family and society must deal with when looking for solutions to child abuse.

The real solution isn't band-aids and crisis therapy, battered children's shelters and jail sentences. That's necessary aftermath damage reduction.

The real solution to child abuse lies in strengthening the family long before the first hand or voice is raised in anger. Before the first sexual demand is made on an unprotected child. Before the first assault or insult eats away at a child's self-esteem, destroys her or his ability to grow to a healthy adulthood. Before the damage is done. That is where the real solution lies.

And that's where you come in, because it is only with your effort and cooperation that the vision of real child abuse prevention can be brought about in Massachusetts. This is your call to assist in strengthening our families. It's never too soon to start.

The task of the Special Legislative Commission on Violence Against Children and the Executive Office of Human Services has been to

convene a partnership of the private and public organizations of government, industry, and health care, of communities and individuals. Over 300 leaders convened and addressed the complex question: "How can we prevent child maltreatment in Massachusetts?" Their contributions formed an array of strategies designed to strengthen families which are outlined in ***A Blueprint for Preventing Child Abuse by Strengthening Massachusetts Families.***

This booklet provides only a sketch of the full ***Blueprint***. You are encouraged to review the complete document for a fuller understanding.



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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PREVENTION PLANNING

1. Children are society's greatest resource. In their own right and as future leaders and producers, they deserve and need the opportunities that will maximize their individual potential and healthy development.
2. Children whose essential needs are not met are often hampered in becoming fully functioning, productive adults. They may become the primary pool of citizens whose dependency on intervention and treatment services poses tremendous costs to society.
3. The family is the primary institution shaping the development of children. Children do not live in isolation. Their lives and healthy development are dependent upon and affected by the quality of their family life.
4. The quality of family life, in turn, is inextricably dependent upon and affected by the quality of community resources, services and social supports.
5. The prevention of maltreatment to children and the promotion of their

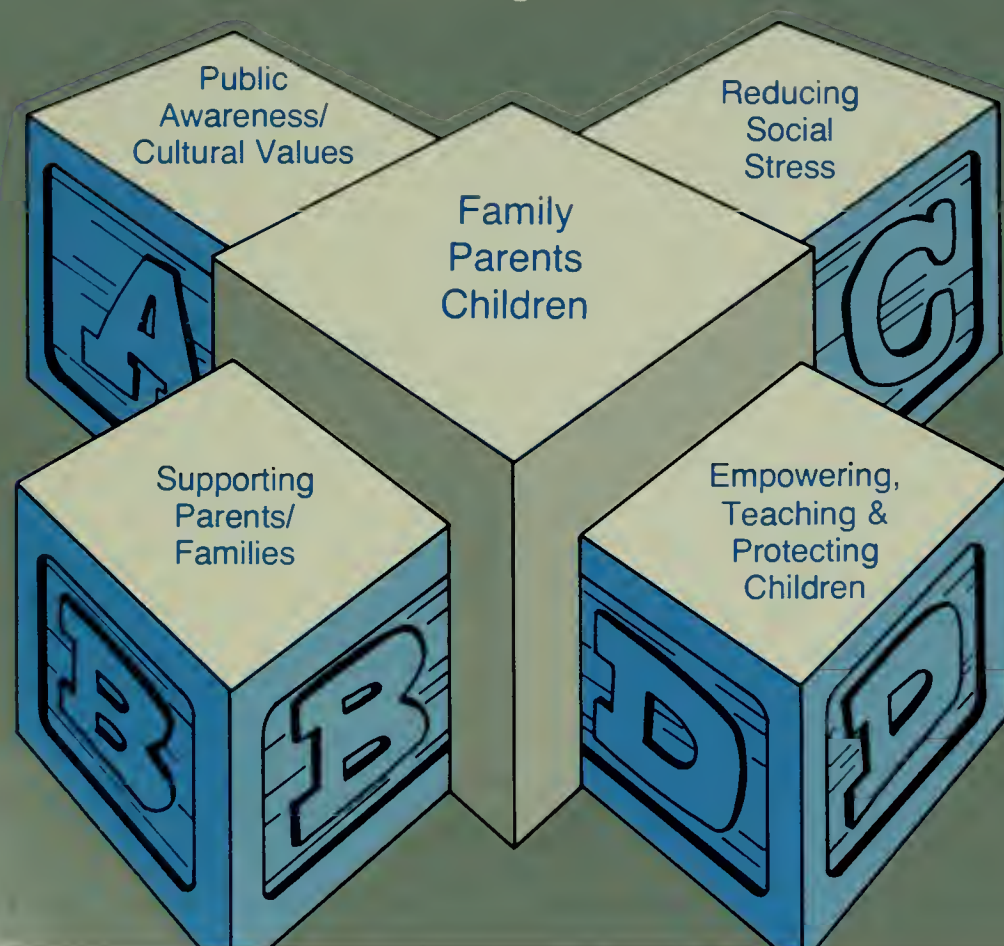
healthy development requires support for families within their own communities.

6. Child maltreatment stems in part from breakdowns in parenting and family functioning and in part from the weak social infrastructures of community support for families. Problems exist in *both* families and communities and thus solutions must focus on strengthening both as settings for healthy child development.
7. Programs and initiatives oriented to strengthening families must be non-stigmatizing, locally responsive, and integrated into a graduated continuum of programs. The continuum of programs must range from primary prevention initiatives aimed at all families and children to secondary prevention services targeted at high-risk families. Whether initiated on a statewide or local level, programs must be carefully grounded in local community needs, resources and circumstances.
8. Prevention programs and initiatives must acknowledge and support the rich diversity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic family heritage found in Massachusetts. Minorities

must play an active role in the development and implementation of community-based prevention programs.

9. The **Blueprint** must represent a partnership among government, the public and private sectors, the community and families themselves. Partnership initiatives should be both statewide and locally implemented.
10. Within the framework of these partnerships, each sector of society (the community, education, health care, legal, social services, and workplace sectors) has a valuable and unique role and responsibility. The contributions of each and the concerted efforts of all must be integrated into a unified vision.
11. Policy, then, must allow a political marriage between two commonly polarized views: *"What should government and communities do for the family?"* and *"What should families do for themselves?"*
The **Blueprint** must aim to integrate these two positions into a policy question of: *"What can government and communities do to enhance a family's capacities to help itself?"**

A Comprehensive Approach to Strengthening Families and Preventing Child Abuse



A. Public Awareness/Cultural Values

Initiatives to promote public awareness and cultural values which discourage child abuse and support the needs and diversity of families and children.

B. Supporting Parents/Families

Initiatives to educate and support parents, and to strengthen and expand services to families.

C. Reducing Social Stress

Initiatives to strengthen communities, increase social support, and reduce external stress on families by assuring economic self-sufficiency, affordable housing, basic health care and child care.

D. Empowering, Teaching & Protecting Children

Initiatives to increase children's knowledge, skills and self-esteem for fullest development of their potential.

OVERRIDING CONCLUSIONS

‘ Understanding that child abuse is a multi-faceted problem suggests the need for a multi-faceted approach to prevention. ’

No single policy or program will be sufficient to prevent physical abuse and neglect, emotional maltreatment and sexual abuse of children. Instead, a combination of strategies is needed to reduce sources of stress on families, and to strengthen the coping resources of communities, families and children.

A multi-faceted approach must be developed in Massachusetts which addresses policy and services in five areas:

- Initiatives to promote public awareness and attitudes which discourage child abuse, support families and children and respect their ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity;
- Initiatives to meet basic family needs for economic self-sufficiency; affordable permanent housing; basic health care; and affordable quality child care;
- Initiatives to strengthen communities, increase social support and reduce external stress on families;
- Initiatives to support and educate parents, and strengthen and expand services to families;
- Initiatives to increase children's knowledge, skills, and self-esteem for fullest development of their potential.

FIVE PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The root causes of child abuse must be addressed. The well-being of families and their capacity to protect and nurture children are intimately connected to the well being of the larger communities in which they live. Thus the goals of the *Blueprint* attend to the well-being of both.

In abbreviated form, then, here are the *Blueprint's* priorities and goals:

I. Changing Attitudes and Beliefs

To promote beliefs which are supportive of families and intolerant of interpersonal violence.

II. Meeting Basic Family Needs

To promote policies which will assure that the basic needs of all Massachusetts families are adequately supported.

III. Changing Institutional Responses to Families

To promote policy and institutional changes which are responsive to the changing needs of families.

IV. Supporting Parents in Their Caretaking Roles

To provide a continuum of family education and support services which prepare and assist adults in their caretaking roles.

V. Teaching and Supporting Children

To provide education, skill-building and supportive programs for children which enhance healthy development and help children thrive in safer environments.

THE FIRST STEPS

Child Abuse Prevention Board and Children's Trust Fund

The most sweeping and comprehensive achievement thus far is the establishment of a Statewide Prevention Board and Children's Trust Fund. The Board is the primary vehicle to provide the leadership and coordination necessary for Massachusetts to reach its prevention goals.

The Prevention Board will manage The Children's Trust Fund and promote programs and initiatives at both the community and state levels.

Enacted into law by Governor Dukakis and the Legislature in January, 1988, Chapter 729 grants the Prevention Board sufficient authority, resources, and sanction to oversee the *Blueprint's* recommendations. It will receive funding through the Legislature, private donations, investments and federal matching funds. Its mission is to promote the implementation of initiatives, policies, programs, resources, and legislation contained in the *Blueprint*, as well as set the future agenda on prevention.

Public Awareness Campaign

The need for a public awareness campaign was clearly identified throughout all of the *Blueprint's* planning stages. It is the cornerstone to a major prevention initiative. The Prevention Board will spearhead a professional, multi-media campaign which reinforces these ideas:

- Children are valued and vulnerable citizens;
- Parenting is a challenging job for everyone;
- Alternatives to interpersonal violence exist;
- Prevention *is* possible!

It's never too soon.

SIX SECTORS WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD SOLUTIONS

Only through the ardent determination and cooperation of six sectors of our society will the goals be reached. Community, Education, Legal, Health Care, Social Services and the Workplace must all come together in a common purpose with a common design: To strengthen and support the family and prevent child abuse in Massachusetts.

“ Nearly half of the American population aged 14 and older volunteered in 1985. The most popular reason: To do something useful to help others. ”

— Gallop, 1985

“ Studies indicate that 60-70% of school dropouts suffer from some form of family abuse and 75% of runaways are running from abuse, neglect, and frequently sexual abuse ”

— Mass. Women's Political Caucus, 1988

“ Histories of physical or sexual abuse were discovered in almost three-quarters of the patients studied, with severity of adult psychiatric symptoms correlated with childhood abuse. ”

— American Journal of Psychiatry, 1987

“ Maltreated children now comprise the largest and fastest growing portion of most juvenile and family court caseloads. ”

— National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1986

“ More than 60% of 445 teen mothers surveyed reported histories of sexual abuse as children. ”

— American Medical News, Oct., 1987

“ The typical American family with Dad at work and Mom taking care of the kids is mainly the stuff of Ozzie and Harriet re-runs. Less than 33% of families follow the Nelson family model, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nearly half the work force is made up of two career couples and single parents. And in a dramatic departure from the old ways, nearly half the mothers with children less than one year old work ”

— Fortune Magazine, 1987

The highlights of the full *Blueprint's* recommendations can be found on the following pages.

COMMUNITY

Sometimes the community is all one has. As a community member, you must see that assistance and support are available where its residents need it most. Some of the work has already been done. Unfortunately, it is not enough and not always well coordinated.

Because every community is different from every other, varied strategies for involvement in prevention are required. But to ensure the well-being of families and children, the vast resources in the community must be mobilized.

- Local government and community-based groups such as youth groups, religious organizations, and self-help groups should seek out and support families at risk.

- Service providers should develop community responsive prevention programs.

- Public and private funding sources should work cooperatively to sponsor prevention projects, including research and evaluation of those projects.

You as a local leader have the opportunity to use your unique, personal knowledge of your own people, community needs and resources to respond to the diverse needs of your community. The well-being of any community will fundamentally depend upon the care that the community gives to its children.

EDUCATION

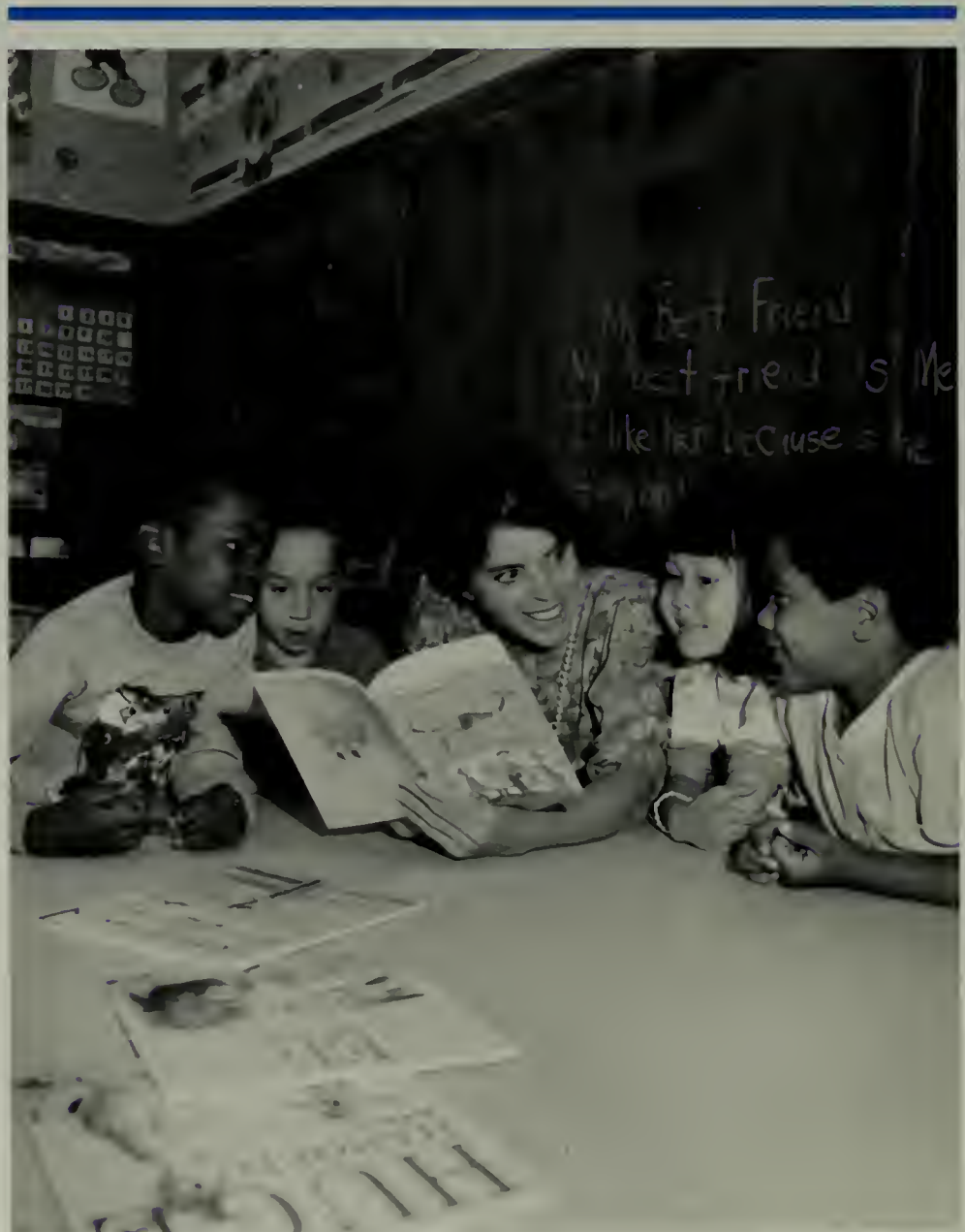
School is the one institution that has access to nearly every child in the community, the one that touches nearly every family. Leaders of education should work to see that:

- The school becomes a family resource center with a broader function in the community. School counseling, psychological and health services should play a key role in supporting parents, children and staff.

- The Department of Education should establish comprehensive health education and human service programs in grades K-12 to include courses in prevention of the many forms of child abuse, neglect, family violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, AIDS, adolescent depression and suicide.

- The Department of Education should help school districts establish high quality early education programs.

You, as a leader in the Education Sector, are in an ideal position to assess community needs for early childhood education, child care, and before/after-school programs; as well as to promote teacher certification requirements which include training in child abuse prevention.



HEALTH CARE

As concern expands from identification and remediation to include prevention of child abuse, you in the Health Care Sector have a vital role to play. Health care providers are among the only professionals who have regular contact with children during the critical years from birth to age five. By acting as “brokers,” this sector can link families and children in need to community services. Health Care professionals should work to see that:

- Parents of newborns should have temporary support services available such as routine home health visits.
- All families should have access to prenatal, perinatal and well-child health care.
- All health care providers should be required to take courses on child abuse prevention.
- All health care facilities should provide child-at-risk protection teams.

The implementation of universal health care coverage will be a giant step in strengthening families. You, as health care leaders, can work to expand mental health insurance coverage and identify reimbursable prevention programs.



LEGAL

The prevention effort requires additional changes in the court systems if we are to fully safeguard the well-being and rights of our families and children. You in the Legal Sector must continue to promote changes which recognize the unique needs of children.

Recommendations:

- Chief Justices of the trial courts should issue a training plan requiring all judges, court personnel and probation staff to receive on-going training in the special needs of children involved in the court systems.
- Justices should make the scheduling of child abuse cases a priority, and coordinate all civil proceedings involving the same child or family.
- Justices should assure that the evaluation of the academic and emotional needs of all children and siblings in court cases are addressed.

Future actions will call upon the Judiciary and the Legislature to consider implementing a statewide juvenile or family court system. Only through continual judicial support and leadership will many of the Commonwealth's children and families be strengthened.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services has a long history of dealing primarily with the aftermath of child abuse, and also has been the leader in the early efforts for prevention and intervention. Now efforts are expanding to build a coordinated and comprehensive continuum of services statewide.

■ Social Services, both public and private, should continue to promote family life education programs; materials should be available in relevant languages to parents of newborns.

■ The sector should provide more programs for adolescents on pregnancy and parenting.

■ The sector should continue to develop child care as a resource for families under stress.

■ The state should continue to increase the number of day care slots and supportive day care rates.

■ Social Services professionals should train and promote the development of: Self-Help Groups, Parent Aide Programs, Emergency Childcare, Respite Services, Parent Information Helplines, Homemaker Aides, and Drop-In Centers.

■ A range of counseling and support services should be accessible to all victims and families of severe physical abuse and child sexual abuse.

As Social Services leaders, you can work to expand the role this sector must play in activating prevention.



WORKPLACE

As more parents have entered the workforce, you in the workplace have assumed an increasingly important position in the health and functioning of families. Making changes in the workplace will support and stabilize the workforce, improve employee morale and productivity, reduce absenteeism, and be an incentive to attract new employees. What is good for families is good for business!

■ The private sector should provide flexible employee benefits packages, including: employer supported child care; maternity/paternity leave; sick child care leave; flexible work/leave time; and employee assistance/family life education programs.

■ Business management schools should be encouraged to educate students in ways to humanize the work environment.

■ The Prevention Board should support the efforts of the Legislative Commission on Parental Leave, and support parental leave legislation at the federal level.

Leaders in the workplace should forge a private/public partnership with government providing incentives to the workplace. They should initiate creative policies that support the workers in their roles as parents.

CONCLUSION

The **Blueprint** provides a realistic, comprehensive framework for strengthening families and preventing child abuse in the Commonwealth. It is a first step, a guideline offering strategies in the prevention effort, enjoining government and community leaders to make a commitment for action.

You are invited to become a part of the solution by increasing your own awareness about child abuse and prevention, then sharing your knowledge.

As community leaders, learn about local prevention programs, or volunteer to assist a family in trouble. Read the entire **Blueprint**, then determine what your organization can and needs to do. Draw up your personal blueprint for action.

If you are a legislator, municipal leader, or trustee of a private organization, support prevention policies and funding. As employers, develop personnel policies which support employees in their parental role. As educators, encourage local school boards to include prevention curricula in schools. If you are a member of the legal profession, respond to the unique needs of children in turmoil. If you are a professional in medicine, mental health, or social services, promote prevention efforts in your sector.

Armed with insight and knowledge, work to create a network of community resources which support the Children's Trust Fund through institutional and individual donations.

As a parent or as a citizen of Massachusetts use your talents, energy and resources to bring the vision of the **Blueprint** to life. You have a unique contribution to make in strengthening a family . . . helping a child . . . keeping that child healthy and strong . . . ensuring the future of the Commonwealth.

For a copy of the complete **Blueprint**, please write to:

Massachusetts Child Abuse
Prevention Board
c/o Office for Children
10 West Street
Boston, MA 02111



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